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NICKELED & DIMED



TRENDING

**INSECURITY WILL
ENGULF CHINA**

INSECURITY WILL ENGULF CHINA

BY ASISH SINGH



Authoritarian regimes outbeat everyone at glossing over weaknesses and boasting off strengths. Once looked upon by the world for its technocratic competence, the CPC is running backwards into a Leninist rigidity. It is projecting an iron-triangle formation of politics, economics, and control.

Today, the population question has come out as the most detrimental consequence of the CPC's lust for complete social engineering, most conspicuously visible in the one-child and similar policies. Latest census data reveals that population growth over the last decade was the slowest. The proportion of people aged 60 and above rose to almost a fifth. The size of 65-and-over will likely double over the next two decades as the workforce contracts, crowning China a "super-aged society." The burden of extra care this misalliance poses can be a severe drag on growth.

Current projections point that age-related spending must triple by 2050, from 10 percent to 30 percent of GDP. For context, understand that all of Chinese government spending currently totals about 30 percent of GDP. The demographic decline China is facing is almost beyond repair. Permitting upto three children now, as per analysts, is equivalent to flogging a dead horse.

A graying China with atrophying fundamentals will pull down productivity. By 2050, China will go from having eight workers per retiree now to two workers per retiree. Chinese debt has more than doubled in the past decades, from 141 percent of GDP in 2008 to over 300 percent in 2019. Swelling debt levels and gloomy long-term growth prospects will make it tougher for China to spend its way up the ladder from low-end manufacturing to high value-added production (read services), as Taiwan, Japan and South Korea did at similar levels of development.

Xi's 'creative destruction' is a project not in 'common prosperity' but common legitimacy. His crackdown on the private sector has cost Chinese tech companies over USD 1 trillion in stock market value, and over USD 100 billion of wealth of Chinese entrepreneurs. In this climate, negative sentiment with respect to entrepreneurship among Chinese youth reflected in number of them registering for the national exam for selecting government workers hitting a record high of 2.1 million this year. China needs to up its innovation game to upgrade its economy and stay relevant. But Xi's model of authoritarian capitalism (not to be equated with even state capitalism) might be the greatest hindrance.

Note that according to Goldman Sachs, China's hidden local government debt has expanded to more than half the size of the economy. Xi's geopolitical position seems to tolerate growing headwinds to private businesses, a housing market crisis causing demand for land to slump, power shortages and supply chain disruptions.

The IMF remains pessimistic: "International experience suggests that China's credit growth is on a dangerous trajectory, with increasing risks of a disruptive adjustment and/or a marked growth slowdown." As per latest available IMF data, China's labour productivity has converged from 15 percent of the world frontier to only 30 percent over the last two decades. Convergence has been leaden-footed in the services sector, wherein productivity has converged from 10 percent at end of 1990s to only 26 percent, during an insecure political climate as described above. The IMF estimates China's total factor productivity growth since the global financial crisis has only averaged 2¼ percent a year, which is only about half of its average in the decade before the GFC. In fact, the decline in TFP explains most of the decline in GDP growth between the two periods. That China rivals the US today owes more to its gargantuan population (with weak social safety and political freedoms), which is four times higher than the US's. China has crossed its peak, its best time has already been unbidden and squandered.

A study of the world wars will tell you that revisionist powers become most ferocious when the gap between their true prospects and ambitions becomes unmanageable. As a dissatisfied China's maneuvering space contracts, even a high-risk plunge for victory may come across as more tasteable to Xi than a deadly ouster. It is then, more about managing China's violent demise. The peak of confrontation is yet to come, and Xi's insecurities shall determine its height.

NOT YOUR KASHMIR KI KALI! – THE PORTRAYAL OF KASHMIRI WOMEN IN INDIAN CINEMA

BY SABAHAAT ALI WANI



Cinematic representations of marginalized communities have always received backlash and considerable public scrutiny. The capitalization, exploitation, and misrepresentation of ethnic communities — their language, dialect, clothing, and even their skin colour — showcases the privileged and willful ignorance present in Indian cinema. From using countless branded bronzers on fair-skinned actors to allow them to play the role of a brown woman to finding the most snow-white like actress to pose as a fair Kashmiri woman with red cheeks, the deeply embedded stereotypes and racism in Indian Cinema need more investigation.

Pre-1989 and Post-1989 Representations

In pre-1989 Indian films, there was a “diminutive” representation of a ‘Kashmiri’ in comparison to the earlier films that didn’t “represent any constituent of Kashmiri identity be it culture, dress, cuisine, music, or language” (Bhat 2015). In 1979, Bollywood tried to imitate a Kashmiri body by using pheran and a headscarf in the movie, *Roti* and failed miserably. Concerning the same, Fokiya writes that the filmmakers mixed up the Kashmiri culture and dress with that of Himachal Pradesh and “further distorted the essence of real Kashmiri characters” (as cited in; Bhat, 2015).

In post-1989 Bollywood movies, the representation of Kashmir and Kashmiris changed drastically. From houseboat owners to militant or militant sympathizers, Indian cinema positioned Kashmiris in these reductive boxes and constructed an image of a ‘Kashmiri being’ to the outside world.

Kashmir Ki Kali: Kashmiri Women and the Colonial Gaze of Bollywood

Bollywood keeps nibbling upon the idea of Kashmiri women’s fair skin and red cheeks by creating an image of a simple beautiful naïve valley girl, easily misguided by the valley’s militant Muslim males. This is how an Indian colonial gaze views Kashmiri women and Bollywood suffers from the same. While reviewing the essay collection titled, *Women and the Colonial Gaze* by Tamara L. Hunt and Micheline R. Lessard, Keskin (2004) writes about the prominent themes of this collection by saying,

“First, colonized women were depicted either as morally corrupt, ignorant, promiscuous individuals who needed the colonizer’s guidance, or as noble savages who embodied desirable virtues such as chastity, modesty, and purity. Second, colonizers utilized these images both to legitimize their colonial administration and to control the women in the metropolis. Third, women from colonizing societies usually approached their colonized sisters differently than the male colonizers. Fourth, women in the colonies were “doubly colonized” because of their nationality and gender. Fifth, the images of colonized women served as invaluable symbols for anti-colonial movements.”

Now, how is this colonial gaze present in the Indian Cinema’s representation of Kashmiri women? In the 1964 film, *Kashmir Ki Kali* (Bud of Kashmir), the story revolved around a ‘rich urban boy’, who visits the countryside and falls in love with a ‘poor local girl’. This girl is the epitome of ‘simplicity and sensuality of nature’ and also, ‘the coded ethnicity of the peripheral and minority-dominated provinces’ (Lutgendorf; as cited in Kabir, 2005). This is the premise of almost all pre-1989 Bollywood movies’ attempts to present a picture of a Kashmiri woman to Indians, not how Kashmiri women truly are but in a way that fulfils the agenda of the Indian Nation and pats its so-called secular back.

Conversely, another movie, *Haider* is to date the closest if not an accurate depiction of Kashmir and undoubtedly, the most contested one too. This movie tried to highlight the aspect of ‘half-widows’ and sought to address the “exact political question” (which I have stressed in the previous articles) revolving the lives of Kashmiri women and has been so far one of few attempts of Indian cinema to put an effort and represent Kashmir in an accurate manner. However, the trope of using Kashmir to try, test and showcase their cine-patriotism appears prominently in recent adventures of Indian cinema as it tries to feed the Indian imagination by exploiting Kashmir and Kashmiris.

UNDERSTANDING THEORIES THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE: HIERARCHY AND ANARCHY IN NETFLIX'S *HOUSE OF CARDS*

BY NACHIKET MIDHA



Popular culture has arguably become a microcosm of the real world. This article tries to analyze Netflix's *House of Cards* through two theoretical lenses—liberalism and realism. The focus of this article is to decode the U.S-Russia relationship as depicted in season three of the series.

Here's a summary of the plotline. In the third season of *House of Cards*, Francis Underwood becomes President of the United States after ruthlessly plying and cheating to 'climb up the ladder' by pushing the sitting President Walker into a personal and political turmoil leading to his resignation. The first lady Claire Underwood (the first lady and also the ambassador to the UN) tries to bypass Russia's veto to garner support for the US' Jordan valley Proposal at the UN. Agitated by this, Russia arrests Michael Corrigan, an American gay rights activist, to prosecute him.

Hierarchy and The Strand of Liberalism

Liberal theory in international relations (IR) rests on certain assumptions and deals with certain levels of analysis. Under this framework, inter-state interaction occurs to represent an interest or coalition of interests that an individual or group represents to gain a comparative advantage. In Michael Corrigan's case, through the state as the supreme negotiator, his release was made conditional on a statement of apology to the Russian Federation. In *House of Cards*, Michael Corrigan (read a transnational individual) cannot negotiate with the 'other' state all by himself since he is not on an equal footing vis-a-vis the Russian federation. Even while operating in this theoretical paradigm, national interest remains the referent point.

While Corrigan is Russia's pressure point against the United States, parallelly, Claire Underwood is building pressure in the United Nations against Russia. These pressure points are products of interactions between trans-governmental and transnational networks. Finally, and more importantly so, this strand in *House of Cards* reinforces the idea that "...state is not disappearing, but it is disaggregating into its component(s)." And, thus showing how this liberal international space opens up as an arena for both contestation (not in a realist militaristic sense) and resolution.

Power, Anarchy and The Strand of Realism

House of Cards' Viktor and Frank can be considered to embody their respective states in themselves. In Morgenthau's formulation, the 'greed' for power is inherent in human nature. In *House of Cards*, Viktor tells Frank that he might consider the Jordan Valley proposal only if the U.S. agrees to dismantle the missile defense system in Europe. Russia and the United States are two men of excess who need more power to try and overpower each other. Petrov argues that designating something as a 'power resource' is to imply something about its usefulness in getting others to change their behaviour.

The US is well aware that Corrigan is a powerful resource to Russia, so instead, it reassigns its troops in the Jordan Valley through an executive order. It is an immediate security threat to Russia since American troops will be extremely close to the Russian Caucasus. But Russia is not entirely at a disadvantage since it still possesses the most indispensable bargaining chip—Michael Corrigan. Thus, this realist strand, wholly based upon power maximization, reinforces the realist school. The reinforcement of the concept of external (international) anarchy is also apparent here. Nevertheless, in our case, it also breaks away from the traditional idea of power, and the argument gains a new legitimacy to view power in a multidimensional sense.

Conclusion—Popular Culture: A Testing Ground for IR Theories

In conclusion, we can see how theoretical binaries, in actuality, can be fluid and intersectional. Through two contrasting approaches, liberalism and realism, one can have two readings of the same event. Furthermore, in some senses, popular culture analysis can help 'test' our theories and intuitions. Additionally, and more significantly, it can also help us identify the gaps that might exist in our theoretical assumptions and aid us in restructuring them to adequately grasp the *real*.

WOMEN AND PROPERTY RIGHTS: EVOLUTION OF HINDU SUCCESSION RIGHTS OVER YEARS

BY RAJAT CHAUDHARY



The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 covers inheritance and succession among Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. In order to properly understand the present law, it's important to highlight the pre-colonial and colonial trends which affected the formation of the Hindu Succession laws and resulted in subsequent changes.

Pre-colonial Trends

The Mitakshara School was followed pan India except for Bengal and Assam. The Mitakshara system distinguished between two properties - joint family property and separate property. Rights on the joint property were limited while on separate property the owner enjoyed absolute rights. Women were only entitled to maintenance of the joint property, and women could have limited interest on separate property, that too, in the absence of sons and agnatic heirs.

The Dayabhaga school was followed in Bengal and Assam, the man was the absolute owner of all his property and with no distinction between joint and separate property. The son, in this case, didn't acquire the right by birth and the division could take place only in the case of the death of the owner with sons having the first right. A chaste widow could inherit a property in the absence of a male heir but couldn't alienate the property.

Trends Under the Colonial Rule

In the first phase of the British rule the laws were heavily influenced by Shashtric knowledge, the officials began participating in the matter of Indian customs and decision making, they did not have any idea about the field and hence relied on either pundits, qazis, or principles of English law. This led to a kind of homogenization of Hindu law guided by the upper castes, and some customs got lost as they were in most cases uncodified. The mid-20th saw the emergence of women's organizations like the Women's Indian Association in 1917 and hence some reforms. But this shouldn't be thought of in isolation; Eleanor Newbiggin suggests that reformatory laws at that time were rather an attempt by the colonizers to meet their post-war expenses, by enhancing their sources of taxes.

Post-colonial Trends

The Hindu Succession Act 1956 came into being owing to the critique of Mitakshara law. The Act removed the distinction between Mitakshara and Dayabhaga. For the separate property of deceased men, it provided equal shares to Class I heirs viz. sons, daughters, widows, and mothers; the right to alienate such property was also granted. In the case of Joint family property, the women were also given an equal share in the "notional" share of the deceased person.

But the law remained discriminatory, Section 6 of the act denied the right of the daughter to be a coparcener in the undivided joint family property as opposed to a son who is given the same right by birth. Similarly, Section 4 (2) of the act gave the state-level tenurial laws precedence in case of inheritance of agricultural lands, section 23 stated how no female heir can claim partition of the dwelling family house, section 24 restricted the rights of the widow in case she chose to remarry.

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 removed the gender discriminatory section 6 from the 1956 act and gave daughters the right to be a coparcener by birth. It also removed Section 4 (2) and the succession in case of agricultural land which was earlier restricted to the state laws were removed. The differential treatment of widows and the denial of the right of daughters to claim partition in the family house was also rectified by the removal of Section 24 and Section 23 respectively. Still, the 2005 act is critiqued on various grounds like its differential treatment of female members where the daughters are considered coparceners, but the position of the mother remains unaltered and the age-old notions of discrimination of females introduced in the family through marriage continue.

Conclusion

There are numerous factors due to which the empowerment project isn't succeeding and one of them—and indeed an important one—is the denial of property to women. Hence, giving property rights to women should be viewed as a much larger political project.

URBAN MOBILITY CRISIS: INDIA NEEDS TO LOOK BEYOND METRO RAIL SYSTEMS

BY MUKUNDAN A
SUDARSHAN RSA



Public transportation in India has been viewed with a great share of distrust by the public, be it in terms of safety, sanitation, or capacity. With the restrictions, fears, and pricing changes brought about through the spread of the coronavirus, this scenario has only worsened. Government responses to this loss of patronage have been found wanting. Efforts to build public trust in the sector, at least prima facie, have been rather scant. However, this does not mean that nothing has been done. There is one outlier that governments across the country have sunk their funds and hopes for solving this problem into metro rail systems.

Metro Rail in India: The Story So Far

The first metro rail system was introduced in Kolkata in 1984. Currently, metro rail systems are present in 13 cities across the country. Plans to increase current capacities and establish more metros in tier 2 cities like Patna, Indore, and the like are well underway. The completion of all currently sanctioned projects would take the country's total investment from Rs 1,484 bn to Rs 6,838 bn.

Can Metro be the Solution to our Urban Mobility Crisis?

Metro rail projects are on the rise in India, but do they solve all of the country's urban mobility problems? First, they are most efficient in terms of energy consumption, considering the amount of people transported and distance covered. They transport a greater traffic of passengers faster and through great distances while occupying less land-space. Rapid transit rail systems cannot be extensively built in all parts of the country. Varying topography and lack of adequate funds remain significant hurdles for the foreseeable future. Long wait lines and cramped travel experiences, as evidenced by great crowding in trains during peak hours, are undesirable to no one.

India is already committed to more than 34 active expansion projects, and is considering 18 more proposals. Almost every major metro line built in India has faced delays, and ended up with dramatically inflated budgets. We, therefore, maintain that metro rail is an unlikely panacea for India's pronounced urban mobility crisis. But does that completely rule out its viability?

The biggest challenge metro systems face is their sheer fiscal inviability. In the year preceding the pandemic, no major metro system in the country reported a net profit. Multiple analyses have pointed to the desire of state governments (which are often responsible for pricing) to over-subsidize fares in the face of falling patronage. But even though these governments have insisted on low prices, consumers themselves are still unhappy. Most metro systems are extremely limited in terms of the areas they serve, and no amount of subsidized pricing can fix the fact that metro lines simply do not go to most places commuters wish to travel to. The result is that metro lines in most major systems operate under capacity most of the time, and pass on their losses to the taxpayer. This has led to fears that they will meet a fate similar to power distribution companies in India, which have developed a permanent dependence on bailouts from the central government.

The Upshot

It is abundantly clear that metro lines cannot be the cornerstone of a national urban mobility strategy. But even as a limited component of this strategy, they require concentrated revisions from the government at the level of planning, development and operation. Monetizing pre-existing networks to fund future ones is not a particularly novel option in infrastructure building. The government must recognize that it needs to do more than just build metro lines to resolve the imminent crisis in urban mobility.



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